DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 093 015 CS 500 750

AUTHOR Allen, Richard K.
TITLE Simulation into Reality: Some Effects of Simulation Techniques on Organizational Communication Students.
PUB DATE Apr 74
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (New Orleans, Louisiana, April 17-20, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; *Communication (Thought Transfer); Course Organization; *Game Theory; Higher Education; *Planning; *Simulation; Student Participation; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

In an attempt to discover improved classroom teaching methods, a class was turned into a business organization as a way of bringing life to the previously covered lectures and textual materials. The simulated games were an attempt to get people to work toward a common goal with all of the power plays, secret meetings, brainstorming, anger, and friendship choices. The idea was to structure the members of the class into a hierarchical organization with organizational goals and functioning departments similar to those of a training-consulting firm. The instructor declared himself to be the general manager, not to keep control, but to stay out of the mainstream of the flow of communication. Organizational positions were assigned to each individual based on expressed preferences in response to a written description of each organizational slot. The advantages of this type of teaching method are the realistic experiences and the official and secret power plays and communication attempts. (RB)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED 093015

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

SIMULATION INTO REALITY: SOME EFFECTS OF SIMULATION TECHNIQUES ON ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION STUDENTS

Richard K. Allen
Central Michigan University
Mt. Pleasant, Michigan 48858

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Richard K. Allen

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER.

1974 ICA Convention
New Orleans

OS 500 750

In a day and age so affluent with change and innovative ideas, there still seems to be a paradoxically remarkable paucity of new classroom teaching methods. In a 200 level organizational communication course recently taught by this author, the need for such a different educational experience became apparent. Acting on an idea sparked by one student, the class was turned into a business organization which could hopefully bring to life the previously covered lectured and textual material. The article which follows will describe the ins and outs of this sometimes simulated, sometimes real attempt to get people to work toward a common goal with all of its power plays, secret meetings, brainstorming, anger, and friendship choices. The purpose of the article is both to suggest an innovative classroom learning experience and to report some of the good and bad sides to such an experience.

The Original Class Format

In addition to a mid-semester and final examination, this relatively small class of 18 was orginally asked to create and deliver a manuscript speech and to write a semester end project paper analyzing the communication system of some outside organization. At approximately mid-semester it was apparent to many of us that the class meetings needed something more. At about the same time it became equally apparent to some of the students that they might have some difficulty finding enough suitable organizations to analyze. From this dual concern grew the notion of changing the class format.

The New Class Format

The change idea was to structure the members of the class into a hierarchical organization with organizational goals and functioning departments. The decision was made that the organization would be a training consulting

firm. It was decided that the manuscript speeches could be incorporated into the organizational scheme as inputs into internal organizational training days. It was further decided that any student who wanted to use the newly formed class-organization communication analysis could do so.

The instructor declared himself to be the General Manager right at the onset. This was done, not so much to keep control, but more to stay out of the mainstream of the flow of communication. Organizational positions were assigned to each individual based upon their own expressed preferences in response to a written description of each organizational slot. Every student was assigned to either their first, second, or third choice and all students felt the assignments were handled fairly. An organization chart was then drawn up and passed out which read as follows:

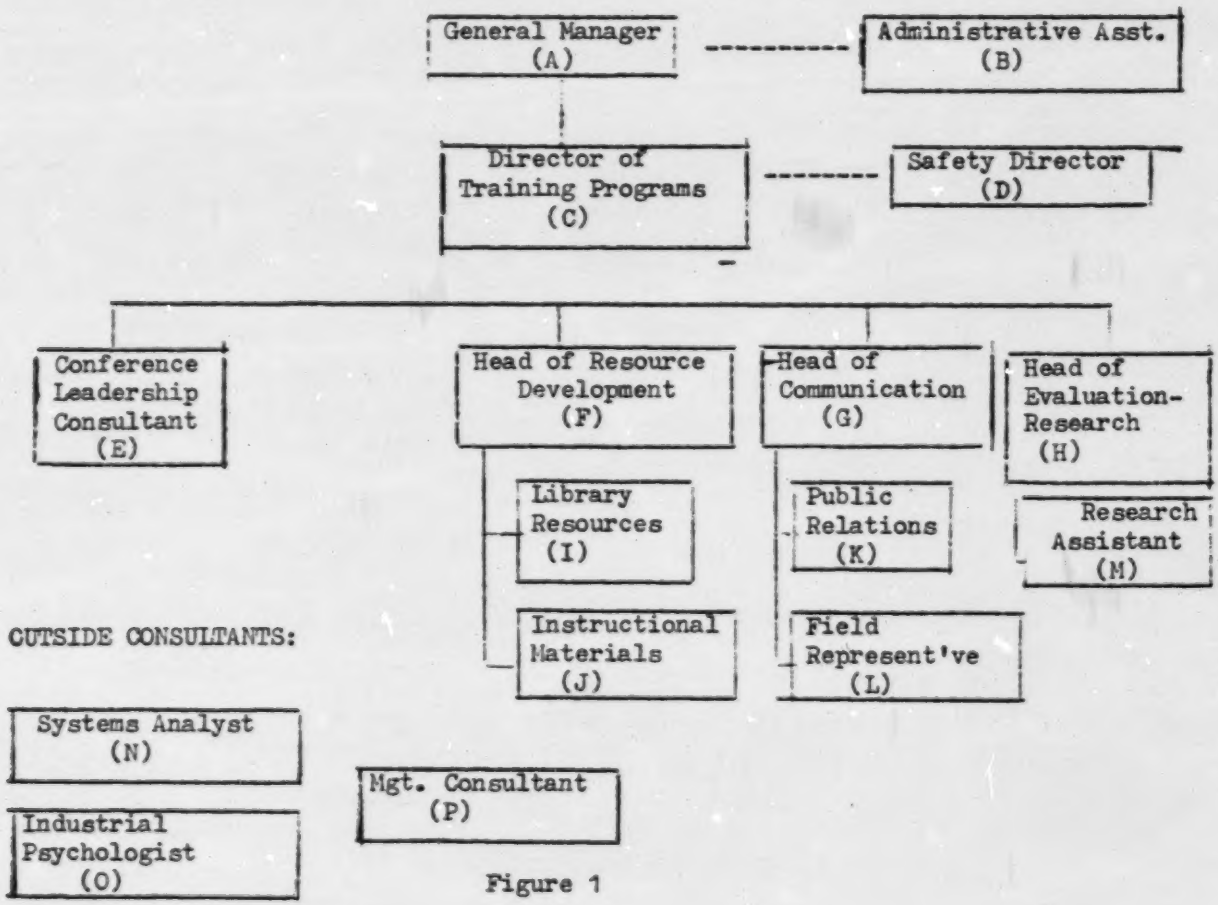

Figure 1

The start was, of course, slow but the author acting now as teacher rather than General Manager decided to give them time to get the feel of their new positions and inter-relationships as well as to form some internal policies and goals. There were some concerns over who talked to whom and the use of verbal, face-to-face communication as opposed to a system of inter-departmental memos. The result seemed to be that certain individuals moved the departmental operation to separate vacant classrooms and closed the door; i.e. one must knock before entering. Additionally, a bulletin board in the original classroom was appropriated for general memos and announcements.

When it appeared that the organizational problems were beginning to settle into place, the instructor created a hypothetical letter based upon a real life situation. The letter was from a manager of an insurance firm requesting consultation and assistance in the presentation of training materials to introduce a new line of insurance with a complicated commission structure to the sales force. The letter was formally typed and just handed to the communication department head. The recipient was told only that this was a letter which had come in the mail for the firm. After an exchange of letters requesting information vital to the case, the class was now functioning more as an organization and less as a class.

The Functioning Organization

Before the case problem was even presented, the administrative assistant came to class one day and began to authoritatively tell the organization what its next moves would be. The reaction to this was not simulated, but a very real rebellion.

Once the problem letter was introduced people began seeking power and/or looking for those who appeared to be in power in order to develop lieutenant

positions for themselves. Many times such power-seeking behaviors are outside of the hierarchical structures. Keith Davis says of the formal organization, "But in his desk this manager kept another organization chart. . . . It was his view of the informal organization." (Davis, 1961). According to Davis, the names were the same but the lines depicting relationships were very different and very important to understanding the total organization. A great deal of the early power struggle in this class-organization exemplified this notion. For instance, there was an early three man power play that ended up holding the bulk of the power throughout the remainder of the experience. Since this triumvirate involved persons C, D, and E (see Figure 1), one would have to conclude that the power elite was more a product of some informal structure than of the formal organization chart. Person E later admitted that the first thing he did was to size up the position and personality of person C and attempt to form an early alliance. Persons C and E gave person D his power and prestige by adding the duties of a sort of roving departmental troubleshooter (perhaps a nice word for "spy") in addition to his somewhat more innocuous role as Safety Director.

The only real threat to this power structure was an attempt to restructure the power by changing the formal organization chart (see Figure 2). This power play was born basically out of disenfranchisement and the ensuing disenchantment of persons N, O, and P. Just as they were calling for a meeting with C, D, and E to discuss these changes, the C-D-E combination was completing secret plans for a new chart (see Figure 3) which more nearly reflected the way they had, in fact, made the organization operate. Again, there was very little simulation here and the clash was quite bitter. According to Borman, et. al, such a "struggle creates a conflict and disagreement between the

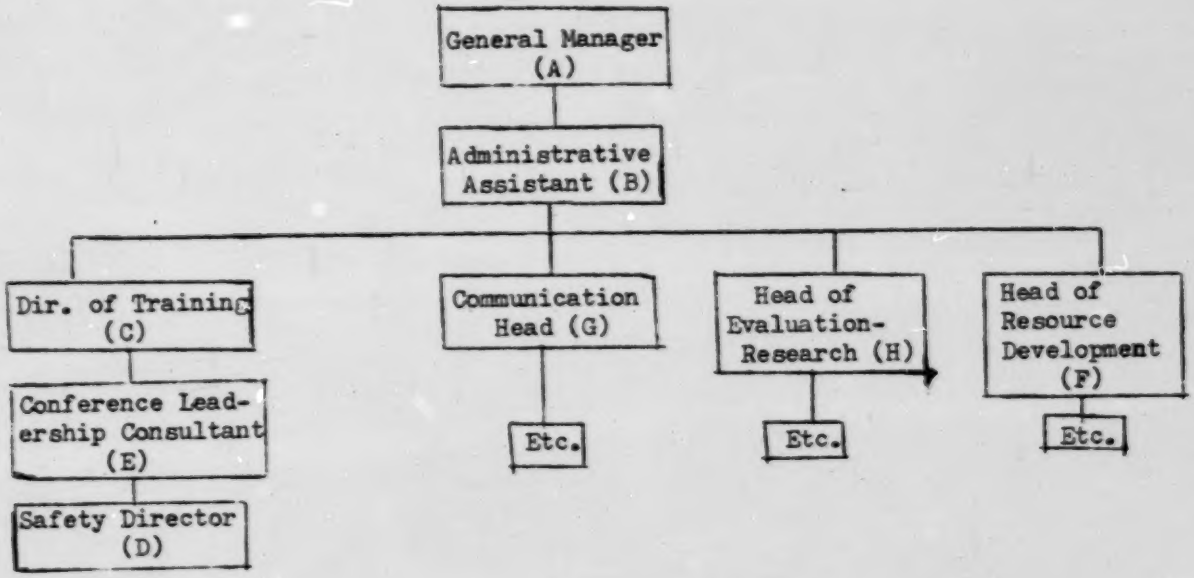

Figure 2

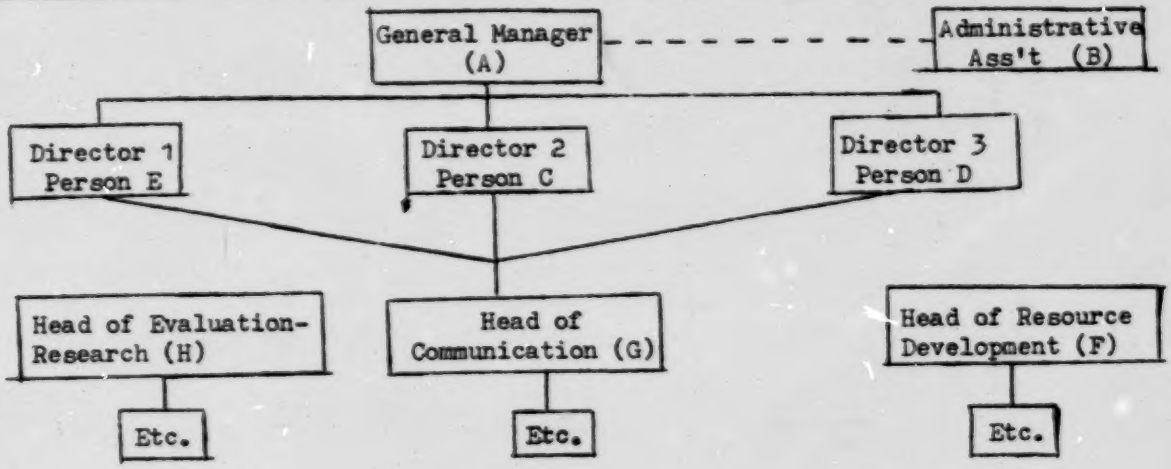

Figure 3

competing members. . . . If these struggles are prolonged and heated, the group may be torn with internal dissension to the point that their work suffers." (Borman, et al, 1969).

The C-D-E group wisely decided, however, that since person B was erratic in attendance and performance and was highly ineffective, the best thing for the organization would be to go along with the new structure suggested by the N-O-P combination. The C-D-E group then went right ahead and continued to operate just as they had been.

The job did get done and, as is typical in many organizations, there were people in the organization who provided inputs to the final solution upon request and never really saw the original problem letter. Perhaps even more typical of a real situation is the fact that those who were somewhat left out of the mainstream did not like it but did produce when asked. The solution to the training problem was a better plan than the abortive one implemented in the real life situation several years prior.

Conclusions

To draw any conclusions we should define simulation or gaming and understand its purposes. We can call simulation "a symbolic imitation," (Abelson and Bernstein, 1963). We can also say that a simulation is an operating representation of the central features of reality. Some writers have made a distinction between simulation and gaming. In this regard, Shubek states:

> Gaming is an experimental, operational, or training technique which may make use of a simulated environment, but is invariably concerned with studying human behavior or teaching individuals. In a simulation, the behavior of the components is taken as a given. The actual presence of individuals is not necessary to a simulation, but it is to a gaming exercise. (Shubek, 1964).

The classroon-organization herein described is really a game, then, since it was a laboratory operationalization of similar decision situations to those one might encounter on the job. It was a training device in which the setting was simulated in that it was representative or symbolic, however the actions taken in the game were real actions taken by real people, with very real outcomes.

The most paramount conclusion, therefore, is probably that, although the organization, the roles, and the case problem were simulated, the reactions and human behaviors that followed were often very real. More important, the student papers indicated that they recognized the same phenomenon.

There are drawbacks to such an educational method which are evident. One is that the unstructured nature of such an experience means that there will be days when things bog down and other days when there just isn't enough time. While this is a very realistic happening, it is sometimes less productive than a more planned classroom setting. Another problem with this particular experience was that it needed more time than the few weeks which were devoted to it. Another time it would be advantageous to run the experience all semester but not every day.

The advantages are numerous. One is the realistic turns taken by the total experience. And as also mentioned earlier, the power struggles, the secret strategy meetings, and dipolmatic withdrawal for the good of the organization were all as educational as they were realistic. The final papers presented by the students indicated that they were able to perceive the communication, or the lack of it, going on around them and with them while they were participating. Perhaps more important was that the students

were able to apply these perceptions to the organizational communication research findings and writing which they had been studying.

One certainty is that this author would recommend such a classroom experience for any type of speech-communication classroom. Such a game will be used again in this class only with better planning and over a longer period of time.

References

[1]Robert P. Abelson and Alex Bernstein, "A Computer Simulation Model of Community Referendum Controversies," in Public Opinion Quarterly, 27, (1963), 93-123.

[2]Ernest G. Borman, William S. Howell, Ralph G. Nichols, and George L. Shapiro, Interpersonal Communication In The Modern Organization (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969).

[3]Keith Davis, "The Organization That's Not On The Chart," in Supervisory Management, (July, 1961).

[4]Martin Shubek (ed.), Game Theory and Related Approaches To Social Behavior, (New York: John Wiley and Sone, Inc., 1964).